UGANDA

Strengthening Community-University Research Partnerships within the Context of Community-University Engagement: The Case of Two Ugandan Universities and One NGO

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This chapter presents a case study from Uganda of community based research (CBR) and community-university research partnerships (CURP) within the context of community-university engagement (CUE). The case study is comprised of two universities: one rural or upcountry based in Gulu and one urban, based in Kampala. These are Gulu and Makerere University respectively. The study also involves one non governmental organization (NGO), the Uganda Adult Education Network (UGAADEN). This chapter starts with a presentation of the national policy framework for CBR/CURP within the context of CUE in Uganda and moves on to present the case study of the selected universities (Government of Uganda, 2001) and UGAADEN as a community based organization. In this chapter, it is understood that CURP can only be undertaken through a structure set up to promote CUE.

National Policy

In Uganda, higher education national policy is guided by the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UOTIA) which came into force in March 2001. It provided for the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), which functions to streamline the establishment, administration and standards of universities and other tertiary HEIs in Uganda along with other related matters in higher education.

The only article in the statute that remotely relates to CUE and therefore CBR and CURP is article 127, which states that “universities shall endeavour to include in [their] teaching and research programmes, solutions to social and economic problems in the community” (Government of Uganda, 2001). This is the only policy at the national level. While this policy does mandate Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to include some attention to the community in relation to curriculum development and delivery, it tends to be in the interest of the universities and not the communities. The policy does not commit universities to involve the community in finding solutions to the problems that are affecting them. The spirit behind this policy statement is that of service to the community and not research partnerships or engagement, which dictates mutuality and equality in the relationship.
There is, however, the nation wide students’ field attachment policy that is being implemented by all private and public universities in Uganda. In this policy of field attachment, students are placed with industry or not for profit and government organizations to work as interns. While this policy exists in the higher education statute, it is, in my view, not sufficient in terms of supporting CBR and CURP in HEIs. It is weak in its formulation. It makes CUE non-compulsory for higher education, which, in turn, makes CBR and CURP non-existent in specific terms. Additionally, the article does not commit the universities to engage with communities in the process of seeking solutions to the social problems in the community. It also does not list the specific provisions for engagement activities. There is not even a statement on how community engagement can be monitored or evaluated. The article reinforces the old community service mentality in which the university extends its service to the community instead of engaging with them as equal partners.

Although not provided for as part of national policy in higher education, all universities in Uganda require their academic staff to engage in community service activities, and this contributes to their promotion from one academic level to the next. Assessment normally includes provision of evidence for such involvement in terms of entries into a CV or letters of appreciation or reference from the non-university organizations.

Neither of the universities included in this study have a clearly articulated model for CBR and CURP. National higher education policy documents have yet to include them as part of the qualifying criteria for the accreditation of new universities by NCHE, and neither is it part of the criteria for periodic review of universities performance in Uganda. Basically, there is no coherent agenda focusing on CBR and CURP apart from fragmented efforts in different individual project initiatives in the different colleges and faculties. There is no proper institutionalized structure beyond individual initiatives. A study that focused on establishing the role of universities and economic development in Africa also came up with similar findings (Bailey, Cloete, Pillay, Bundting, & Maassen, 2012).

**National Funding Mechanisms**

In the past, the Department of Extramural Studies (DEMS) funded community-university engagement public lectures on democracy and nationalism. In the beginning, only Makerere University was funded since it was the only university in existence.

Presently, limited public funding arrangements at the national level for community-university engagement is available in the form of Presidential initiatives for a few selected projects at the universities. There are a number of such projects under the Presidential Science Initiatives at various public universities. Most of these intervention projects are implemented in collaboration with the local communities.
Government also provides general funding for government sponsored students in universities and this includes funding for their field attachment activities. It can be assumed that since the government provides subvention funding to public universities to take care of staff salaries that the staff are expected to get involved in community-university engagement. It can thus be concluded that government funds community-university engagement indirectly by picking up the cost of staff salary.

Private students pay for their field attachment, internship and industrial training. They normally get this funding from their self, sponsors or parents. There are no other sources of funding with the exception of some donors who fund specific universities to initiate the internship programs. For example, from 1996-2002 USAID (ADC/IDEA Project) provided funding for some students to undertake internships at Makerere University and the I@mak.com project also offered funding for several students in the same university. Civil society organizations contribute by hosting the students who come for their field attachments.

Donors like Carnegie, NORAD, DFID, and USAID fund a number of community intervention projects and at research different universities. There is also research grant support from the Governments of Sweden and Norway, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), Carnegie Corporation of New York, World Bank, DANIDA, and USAID/CRSPS. This type of funding has always been very useful in enabling universities in Uganda to implement research activities in the communities.

Selected Higher Educational Institutions in Uganda

In the absence of national policies, HEIs are free to devise their own institutional policy guidelines to engage in CURP. Accordingly, most universities provide for CUE as part of their mission statements, which is teaching, research and service to the community. This is popularly known as the “third mission”. The language of “engagement” or “community outreach” is sometimes used but mostly it is “service”. With that provision at the institutional level, all universities in Uganda can explain their CURP under the community outreach or knowledge partnership arrangement.

CBR is only part of the other extra-mural activities such as community development projects and relationships with industries and commerce. It also includes lecturers engaging in community intervention activities or sitting on NGO Boards and providing short courses and doing consultancy research for different non-university organizations (Bailey, Cloete, Pillay, Bundting, & Maassen, 2012, p. 69). Basically this policy definition is very broad and does not specifically focus on CURP. It cannot therefore be substantively regarded as a policy that provides for and commits higher education institutions to undertake CURP.

For this particular case study two institutions have been selected. Gulu University founded in 2003 in Northern Uganda as a rural based university and
Makerere University, which is in Kampala in Central Uganda as an urban-based university. Both these universities are public.

**Gulu University**

Gulu University is one of Uganda’s public universities located in Gulu Municipal Council, Laroo Division in Northern Uganda. It was founded in 2003 by an act of parliament and started its operation in a newly established District Farm Institute.

Gulu University prides itself as a university that focuses on community transformation through engagement with the community in addressing the socio-economic problems affecting both the university and the community. This is enshrined in its mission statement which states, “To provide access to higher education, research and conduct quality professional training for the delivery of appropriate service directed towards community transformation and conservation of biodiversity” and in the Motto of the university which is “For Community Transformation” (Gulu University, 2010, p. 5).

With the vast intellectual resources and talents represented by its faculties and institutes, staff and students, the university seeks to maintain and improve its interaction with the society that sustains and nurtures it by focusing on improving human conditions and providing effective and lasting solutions to diverse needs. In particular, the university has a mission to serve groups that do not have positions of power within society.

The proposed guiding principle for Gulu University’s CBR and CURP is reciprocity. In this, CUE is a joint effort in which members of the community work together with faculties, staff and students to identify needs and develop solutions in a community based research context that is naturally a CURP arrangement. This can also be described as the principle of mutuality and respect for each other as equal partners in seeking solutions to the problems that affect both the university and the community.

The university is now in the process of developing a policy that can support the goals of CUE within which CURP will be done by providing guidance to individuals and academic units on how to appropriately integrate CUE into the academic and research programmes of the University. While still in its draft form, this policy is envisaged to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of CUE activities including CURP. The guidelines will also help faculty and institute members, mentors, and supervisors to ensure that CUE research projects are both engaging and scholarly so that both the university and its communities are well served.

The proposed policy draft provides for an institutional structure that is headed by a Director of Community University Engagement that is equivalent to the Directorate of Graduate Training and Research and the Directorate of the Quality Assurance also under development. This directorate will be responsible for
facilitating the process of and coordinating university wide community-university engagement activities.

The strategic plan of Gulu University identifies “Community Outreach Services” as one of the ten major issues on which to focus its action. It is also one of the seven selected priority areas of the University. While these are clear indications of the university’s commitment to the community, the idea is still that of service to the community and not rigorous research engagement with the community. The difference is that engagement, unlike service, is a two way process in which the two parties are involved as equal partners and not as giver and recipient of an intervention. There are mutual benefits to both parties in such a mutual research context. The university also lists outreach programmes including research as one of the key highlights and achievements during the last planning period of 2009/10. One of the key areas of CUE relevant to the region in which the university is located, and in which the university is already making a significant contribution, is peace building and conflict transformation (Gulu University, 2010).

The strategic goal for Community Outreach Services (COS) is that, “Transformation of Communities is enhanced and sustained” (Gulu University, 2010, p. 12). To achieve this goal the university has planned a number of objectives, one of which is the development and strengthening of the community outreach programmes. In relation to peace building and conflict resolution, the university is promoting the traditional conflict resolution and training of trainers in peace building and conflict resolution. In promoting the traditional conflict resolution based on the Acholi traditional justice system of “Mato Oput”. This traditional justice system is part of the Acholi Indigenous Knowledge systems, and it involves restorative justice as opposed to the western retributive justice. It is being promoted by the academy, Gulu University, in partnership with the community, the elders of the Acholi people whose main medium of communication is the local language (Lenhart, 2012; Lonergan & Anyeko, 2012).

In the strategic plan, community-university engagement functions, which are termed “Community Outreach Services” (COS), are placed under the Dean of Student’s office who is responsible for the implementation of all the planned activities. The Dean is expected to form an Outreach Services Committee. This committee is already in place and it is the one formulating the CUE policy under the guidance of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs. Along with the development of the CUE policy, the committee is also going to be tasked with the responsibilities of developing the quality assurance criteria for assessing CUE activities in the university.

At the moment all CUE activities are going on as part of the commitment of the academic staff’s effort in fulfilling the third mission of the university and also to their own terms and condition of service that specifies that they be expected to engage in community-university engagement activities. Under this arrangement, there are a number of community outreach projects. One such project is the
COPP, which is the Community Outreach Peace Project of the Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies. There are a number of other such projects in the Faculty of Agriculture and Faculty of Medicine. These projects are being implemented in collaboration with other universities in Uganda and Europe and funded by different donors. Examples of such projects include the Capacity Building for Local Government, Psycho Traumatology Project, Epilepsy Project, the Millennium Science Initiatives, and the guidance and counselling services offered by Gulu University to the surrounding community (Gulu University, 2010).

The concept of community based research (CBR) is still not very popular. What is popular is applied research geared towards community transformation (Gulu University, 2010). Therefore, all community-engagement activities are driven by the idea of applied research. This shows that while research and community-university engagement is properly linked, the link between community-university engagement and the curriculum is not very clear.

The fact that the concept of community-university engagement is not very well known confirms that the current discourse of community-university engagement is not yet known in Uganda. Higher education and the old community service discourse is still very much the defining concept in Uganda. That is why the term or concept of “Community Outreach” service is still very popular in discussing or presenting issues relating to university interaction with the communities in Ugandan higher education (Openjuru & Ikoja-Odongo, 2012).

Community-university engagement is part of the responsibilities of all academic staff and it contributes to their professional growth. There are credits or points awarded for community-university participation when staff apply for promotion to the next academic rank in the university (Gulu University, 2010). In addition to promotion, staff participation in CUE helps to enhance their publications, which contributes to the profile of the staff internationally as well as locally. Students are also encouraged to participate in community-university engagement activities as part of their learning experiences.

There is limited public funding for community-research partnerships beyond the indirect funding of salary payment for the academic staff who are expected to initiate and participate in community research activities. Of course the academic staff are paid to execute their responsibilities of teaching, research and community engagement. The second line of funding is from the various donors that fund community-university initiatives as outlined above. Some of this funding is for research and community development initiatives.

**Makerere University**

Founded in 1922, Makerere University is one of the oldest universities not only in Eastern Africa, but also in Africa as a whole. Community-university engagement (CUE) has a very long history as one of its core functions. According to Atim (2004) the history of community service at Makerere University dates back to 1953 with
the formation of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies (DEMS) to help prepare the country for political independence. According to Openjuru and Ikoja-Odongo (2012, p. 161), “Makerere University is unusual in that it can demonstrate some university-wide strategies and structures” that promote community-university research partnerships in its knowledge transformation partnership initiatives. The departmental motto was taking the university to the people and bringing people to the university. The power element loaded in this statement is that in both cases the university is the one taking the leading initiative while the people are the ones to be taken to and brought into the university. The discourse of CURP and CUE dispenses with that kind of power relation. Even the knowledge transfer partnership paradigm moves away from that kind of power asymmetry.

Since 2008 all Makerere community-university research partnerships and engagement were guided by research, innovation, and the knowledge-transfer partnership and a networking strategic focus. Some of the relationships take the form of a tripartite partnership of Makerere University, an international development partner, with a community based organization (CBO). In this relationship, the funding will come from the international development partners, with implementation done by Makerere University in collaboration with the community based or civil society organization (Okech, 2004; Makerere University, 2010; Openjuru & Ikoja-Odongo, 2012).

The universities strategic goals and objectives for the next ten years describe community-university research partnership and engagement in terms of knowledge transfer partnership and networking (Makerere University, 2008). This was a shift from the old ‘community outreach services’ discourse. This paradigm shift was brought about because it is now known that knowledge does not only reside in universities but in the communities, the private and public sectors. Universities can also “learn and leverage their entrepreneurial and innovative capabilities” (Openjuru & Ikoja-Odongo, 2012, p. 161). Under this new thinking at Makerere University, knowledge production and transfer between universities and the broader community is a two way process which calls for a closer collaboration between universities and the communities outside the university. Accordingly both the community and the university are regarded as both knowledge recipient and knowledge generators in all community-university research relationships (Openjuru & Ikoja-Odongo, 2012).

Under this paradigm and knowledge transfer partnership, Makerere University has positioned itself to meet emerging socio economic challenges. This focuses on enhancing the university’s capacity to link with and serve the community, the private and public sector of the country (Makerere University, 2009). To promote Community University Engagement, Makerere University designed a plan for

...creating an enabling environment for the public and private sector to interact with the university in the promotion of education in a competitive setting and providing a partnership framework for
assessments and utilization of university products in a value chain.
(Makerere University, 2008, p. 18)

The key performance objectives for the implementation of CUE at Makerere University are as follows:

1) To increase private sector participation in University activities,
2) To promote increased joint research, technology innovation and transfer initiatives to address stakeholder needs,
3) To establish a partnership for public and private sector utilization of university competencies.

The following strategies are deployed to realize these objectives

1) Involve stakeholders in the development of the university policy agenda
2) Establish collaborations and networking with public, private sector institutions
3) Create research and technology innovation and incubation business centres and model villages.

To measure the success of the above goals and objectives, the following key performance indicators have been developed:

1) The number of joint projects established with the private sector
2) The number of operational business and technology innovation incubation centres established
3) The number of staff scholarships from the private sector.

To establish a partnership for the public and private sectors to utilise university competencies, the following strategies are deployed:

1) Involving the public and private sectors in the development of University curriculum
2) Involving stakeholders in planning the supervision and evaluation of the students on field attachments
3) Creating a resource pool of university expertise for the public and private sector to utilise.

The key performance indicator for the use of university product is the level of participation of the private sectors in university policy and curriculum development (Openjuru & Ikoja-Odongo, 2012, p. 166; Makerere University, 2008, p. 18).

In the above strategy of CUE at Makerere University, the primary focus is on government (public) and industry and commerce (private) and not communities or civil society. The aim of this strategy is very obviously financial. The university hopes that in working with those financially abled sectors they will enjoy some financial rewards to the university. The motive is therefore neo-liberal and not
civic. That is, the CUE is being driven by the desire of the universities, now under limited public funding and therefore experiencing financial constraints, to raise some funds for the university. It denotes that there are financial constraints which limit civic CUE at Makerere University and even Gulu University, since both are public universities.

**University-wide structure for community-university engagement.**

Makerere University has a very decentralized structure for the provision of CUE and thus CURP. That is to say, the different schools and colleges have a lot of freedom for implementing CURP activities without reference to any university-wide coordinating centre or office. Some colleges, like the College of Health Sciences have established the Infectious Disease Institute (IDI), through which the School of Medicine conducts research in the community and collaborates with other health organizations in addressing the problem of infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS. The College of Veterinary Medicine and Biodiversity (COVAB) has the Africa Institute for Strategic Animal Resource Services and Development (AFRISA), through which it conducts all its community-university engagement. These are semi-autonomous entities that operate within the university but without the limitation of university administration placed on it. This is one emerging community-university engagement model at Makerere University.

Colleges, schools and departments in most cases sign Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) with local governments or civil society organizations to implement some community development intervention and research project. Makerere University was particularly active in capacity building and research for the decentralised governance that was introduced in Uganda from the year 2000.

Alternatively there are other university-wide permanent structures such as the Makerere University Private Sector Forum (MUPSF). This came through a university-wide committee structure known as the Academia Network Committee (ANC) that works with the Makerere University Private Sector Forum (MUPSF). MUPSF is a SMART partnership arrangement set up by Makerere University in response to the Africa Wide SMART Partnership Dialogue to work as a cross-sector forum that brings together the Public, Private sectors and Makerere University to address issues of mutual concerns in line with the objective of the Global SMART Partnership movement of promoting socio-economic transformation. Through this arrangement, the private sector is brought into close collaboration with the university. Through the MUPSF the university is stimulating the private sector’s active participation in university activities, policy agendas and the promotion of education and access of the private/public sector to university services. A SMART Partnership Dialogue Think Tank established in July 2009 is charged with the identification of the type of knowledge that can be transferred between the university and the community (Makerere University, 2010). This SMART Partnership dialogue is a global movement within which the MUPSF was created.
to facilitate the participation of Makerere University, as key stakeholder, in the Africa SMART Partnership Dialogue Think Tank chapter (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009; Openjuru & Ikoja-Odongo, 2012, p. 172).

One of the outstanding university wide community-university engagements involving students, lecturers and members of the community in a single activity is the field attachment. The Makerere University Senate approved this curricular inclusion in July 2006 to provide students with hands on work experience in their discipline. This is now a major component in all academic programmes not only at Makerere University but in all other public and private universities as well. Makerere University like all other universities that adopted this curricular development has developed a policy guideline for the implementation of field attachment. In field attachment there is a feedback loop for improving the internal academic programmes of the university. The students undertake research in the community in which they are doing their field attachment supervised by a member of an organizations in the community together with a university based supervisor, and write a report.

As Openjuru and Ikoja (2012, p. 173) explain, “the importance of field attachment in the university training and as an engagement function can not be disputed.” This is because one of the key objectives of field attachment is to enhance and consolidate the linkages between the university and the community. It is one way through which the university involves the community, the private sector, and the public sector including civil society in their training and research programmes as equal partners. The field attachment provides the stakeholders with an opportunity to understand the working of the university curriculum and reflect on its relevancy in terms of the job or performance expectation and advise the university accordingly during their programme review process. The field attachment also helps the university to identify the training and human resource needs of the different organizations and tailor their programme development to respond to those needs.

**General Observations about Institutional CUEs**

In general universities will need to have some training in Community Based Research (CBR) to enhance the participation of both faculty and staff in community-university research engagement. At the moment, outside of the field attachment there are neither guidelines nor principles on how community-university engagement should be done. Nor is there any understanding, outside of the university community service mentality, of what really constitutes community-university engagement. What is in place is the perspective that anything that is done outside the university constitutes university-community engagement, regardless of the power asymmetry in the relationship.
Community/Civil Society: UGAADEN

It is incomplete to talk about community-university engagement without including an understanding of what happens in the communities with whom the universities are expected to engage.

In Uganda, the community outside the university consists of community based organizations (CBOs), non-government organizations (NGOs), private industrial and commercial organizations and government, which also consist of local governments, ministries and government statutory bodies. Community-university relationships are usually conducted through memoranda of understanding (MOUs), which specify the details of the responsibilities between the two institutions, including how the funding is to be generated and utilized to support their engagement activities.

For this case study, I have selected the Uganda Adult Education Network (UGAADEN), which is a network of adult education organizations in Uganda. One of the founding members was the former Institute of Adult and Community Education (IACE) now the School of Distance and Lifelong Learning of the College of Education and External Studies. This civil society organization has the responsibility of promoting the teaching and practice of adult education in Uganda. Accordingly, together they have worked on a number of community development intervention projects in which the university has provided expertise for the network members who are, for example, engaged in skills training and adult literacy education. They (UGAADEN and the university) engaged in the promotion of a number of community livelihood projects, environmental sustainability projects and many other projects which can be achieved through community education and training programmes. They have also organized a number of joint conferences with support from the German Adult Education Association DVV-International. This relationship started in the early 1980s and lasted until 2012 whenDVV-International terminated its support to UGAADEN after a period of over 30 years.

While UGAADEN works closely with the university in the promotion of the profession, teaching and practice of adult and community education, they have not in anyway engaged in the promotion of CBR or CUE as active areas of focus. However, within the last year UGAADEN has picked up interest in community-university engagement as a key activity to which it is planning to devote its efforts. Already, they have been very active in the organization of an East African Meeting on Community University Engagement, thus becoming the founding members of the East African Network of Community-University Engagement. UGAADEN also participated in the launch of the Higher Education in the World 5-Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change (Hall & Tandon, 2014). These are the only activities in which any CSO is actively promoting CUE in Uganda, which means that UGAADEN has become the first CSO to go in this direction.
Already UGAADEN has signed an MOU with the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biodiversity (COVAB) of Makerere University, to promote the community education programmes of this college and conduct community-based research and community-university research partnerships. It is also redirecting the COVAB’s community initiative along the discourse of community-university engagement and focusing them on the engagement scholarship. The purpose is to encourage the college staff to recognize the contribution of community members, as well as tap into this ignored knowledge base in their teaching of Vet Professionals who are expected to work with these communities. Already the college leadership was very active in the GUNi World Report launch after being encouraged by UGAADEN to provide a keynote address based on their colleges’ community-university engagement experience.

Taking advantage of its networking role, UGAADEN plans to roll out to other universities as well as encourage other civil society organizations to start working closely as equal partners with the university. Already with the intervention of UGAADEN, the Federation of Education NGOs of Uganda (FENU) was able to hold one of its bimonthly thematic meetings hosted by the School of Distance and Lifelong Learning. The School of Distance and Lifelong learning was encouraged to become one of the active members of this FENU thematic group meeting as it relates to the school’s teaching focus. This is another way by which UGAADEN is already actively promoting CUE in Uganda.

The Uganda Adult Education Network is the only community-based structure that has been facilitating engagement with Universities and directly promoting the discourse of CUE in Uganda. Two factors are new in this initiative: firstly, the deliberate presentation of community members as equal partners and secondly, the promotion of CUE and CBR as an active discourse in Uganda. However, to measure up to this task, UGAADEN will still need to develop the capacities within its membership for CBR. In that way they will be in the position to relate with universities as equals.

As far as engaging with the university is concerned, UGAADEN has sufficient human resource capacity that can be mobilized from the university and from other civil society organizations for the promotion of this CUE and CBR agenda in Uganda. It also has the capacity to mobilize financial resources from development partners, yet as of now there are still limited financial means for UGAADEN to promote the agenda of CUE and CBR in Uganda. What it relies on is its available human resource capacity in terms of the executive members and few volunteer staff who are running the secretariat.

The leadership of UGAADEN, notably the chairperson, is already very active in the international movement that is promoting community-university engagement and Community University Research Partnerships. The chairperson works with a committee of eight other members strategically located in different parts of Uganda. Using this committee structure and its membership that is spread
throughout the country, UGAADEN has the capacity to work with all the universities located in different parts of the country.

**Conclusion**

In this case study I have highlighted CUE efforts of three institutions: two universities—one urban and one rural—and one CSO (Civil Society Organization). In all cases, it is clear that whereas these institution have been having a long practice of CUE, they have been doing it under the COS (Community Outreach Service) arrangement in which the university will approach the community not as equal partners but as potential beneficiaries of their services. In this kind of relationship, community contribution in terms of knowledge has been disregarded. The relationship between the CSO in this study (UGAADEN) was around working together as partners receiving support from the German Adult Education Association. This relationship as already pointed out was about sharing the funding that was coming from DVV-International, the German adult education organization. Therefore, while the potential for CUE is great, the capacity to raise funding to finance CUE is still very limited, as is the capacity for CBR. Overall, the discourse of community-university engagement as different from the old community service discourse that motivated the extra-mural functions of the university is just emerging over the last two years and is beginning to gain ground.

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